

MARÍA CRISTINA RAMOS

ARGENTINA'S WRITER CANDIDATE
FOR HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN 2020 AWARD



*'... at the risk of floods and stillness
In failed calls that endorse
A greed of unharmed words
A certain literary background.'*

*From 'Diariamente' (On a Daily Basis),
in En un claro del mundo (In a Clearing in the World)*



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María Cristina Ramos was born in San Rafael, Mendoza, in 1952. In 1978, she moved to Neuquén, in the Argentine Patagonia. She completed her teaching degree in Literature and won the Leopoldo Marechal first prize in the region of Cuyo, organised by renowned author Antonio Di Benedetto just one year before the beginning of the infamous last dictatorship, when he was detained and disappeared.

She has participated as a trainer in reading programmes both nationally and regionally since 1983.

Her first book for children—selected and published by Graciela Montes—was *Un sol para tu sombrero* (A sun for your hat), continuously reprinted since and currently edited by Random House Mondadori.

In 1990, her short story *Las lagartijas no vuelan* (Lizards can't fly) was awarded a Special Mention at the Antoniorrobes Latin American Awards, organised by IBBY México, and in 1991, *Coronas y galeras* (Crowns and top-hats) won the first prize in the same event.

In 1997, *De barrio somos* (Our neighbourhood) was shortlisted for Norma's Fundalectura award, and in the same year, Norma published *Ruedamares, pirata de la mar bravía* (Ruedamares, a pirate of the raging sea). Also in 1997, her book *Un bosque en cada esquina* (A forest on every corner) won the first prize in the National Contest for Children's Fantasy Books, sponsored by UNICEF and the Secretariat of Culture, Sociedad Argentina de Lectura (Argentine Reading Association), and other institutions. In 2006, *Mientras duermen las piedras* (While the stones sleep) was shortlisted for the 3rd International Anaya Prize for Literature for Children and Young Adults.

Several of Ramos' works have been selected for Argentina's community libraries' collections and by SEP in Mexico. They are also mentioned in book lists selected by Fundalectura, El Banco del libro (the Book Bank) and Argentina's Ministry of Education every year. Ramos' books have often been awarded mentions in ALIJA, the Argentinian IBBY National section. Three of them were translated into Chinese, Corean, and Portuguese. Her work is presently being studied in postgraduate courses, master's degrees, and literature seminars in Argentinian universities.

Since 2002 she has been running Ruedamares publishing house. Since 2017, she runs 'Lecturas y navegantes' (Readings and navigators), a training program for the promotion of literature reading in public schools in the Argentine Patagonia, sponsored by SM Foundation.

La casa del aire. Taller literario (The House in the Air. A Literary Workshop) is her fourth and latest non-fiction book, aimed for teachers and reading promoters. In this book, Ramos offers some of her experiences at the reading and writing workshops for children she organised for 25 years, after attending workshops by Professor Nicolás Bratosevich, first in Patagonia and later in Buenos Aires.

María Cristina Ramos has received national and international distinctions. In 2016 she received the Ibero-American SM Award for Children's and Young Adults' Literature. The jury commended 'her craftsmanship and her profound respect for her readers, characters, and the reality she recreates', highlighted 'her genuine and independent authorial voice', and acknowledged 'the subtle incorporation of values and cultural practices of indigenous people'.



Luis Fernando Crespo Navarro
President SM Group

Madrid, 12 November 2018.

Introducing María Cristina Ramos to a jury is an opportunity for its distinguished members to meet a renowned and prestigious author in the field of children's literature in Spanish, a woman who lives by and for literature.

In a world full of falsehood, hastiness and frenzy, María Cristina Ramos' carefully crafted, 'slowly-cooked' texts—enhanced by her commitment to the transformation of human beings and society—are a gift for her readers. Just like the great masters of literature, Ramos seems to write in the most natural and simplest of ways, and with the utmost honesty, while displaying the highest literary quality.

Ramos' authorial voice, both genuine and independent, is not conditioned by any aesthetical, social, or political fads. This is a voice that subtly takes in the cultural values and practices of the peoples from her native land, the Argentine Patagonia.

Through her work, María Cristina Ramos contributes to the visibility of indigenous boys and girls by making them the protagonists of her literature. A special note must be made on her meaningful work *Azul la cordillera* (Blue, the mountain chain). This highly poetic book affirms a commitment to the realities of a native culture. Here, learning to read and write—and literature itself—become a bridge to access the culture of an ancient people.

Because poetry runs through her veins, María Cristina Ramos helps all readers—especially the youngest ones—approach this world and use it to conceive reality from a poetic perspective, like a child's game—i.e., unfiltered, connecting with the essence and depth of existence. Thus, starting with rhythm and by means of a strong poetic sensitivity, as she turns daily experiences into rhyme and song, the writer introduces children to the art of reading as a source of enjoyment and amazement.

The literature of María Cristina Ramos casts a true and sensitive light on Latin American reality. Her craftsmanship reflects her deep respect towards her readers, her characters, and the reality she recreates. Her works provide a unique experience, offering readers' sensitivities a moving and enriching aesthetic perception.

Ramos is clearly committed to literature as a path that reveals painful aspects of the human condition.

María Cristina Ramos displays a remarkable skill as an explorer of genres and forms through her high quality work, aimed at a wide range of readers.

This letter would be incomplete should I fail to mention—aside from her literary merits—Ramos' indefatigable activity in promoting reading in the most remote Patagonian areas and her dedication to training rural teachers, her contribution to reflection and literary criticism through her writing and pedagogical planning, and her personal commitment to the book industry through her own publishing house, Ruedamares.

I am honoured at the chance to introduce an author who helps transform social realities through poetry that inspires commitment and hope.

As they got off the train, we would stand on tiptoes so we could see our uncle's hat and the silk handkerchief my aunt used to wave at people.

Perhaps writing means repeating this gesture, standing on tiptoe to make out what other people see beyond common walls—at least as far as people's eyes, as far as their hat rims, at the limit between sun and shade—in the space where life exists in a low voice.'

María Cristina Ramos

Silk Threads to Sustain Childhood. The Poetics of María Cristina Ramos

Written by María José Troglia . Included in the book *Para tejer el nido . Poéticas de autor en la literatura argentina para niños. (Knitting the Nest. The Poetics of Authorship in Argentinian Literature for Children.)*

With the subtle threads of language

This work is an approach to María Cristina Ramos' poetic and narrative work, an attempt to analyse the recurrent elements that help her give shape to a social meaning in literature, the possibility of creating networks of meaning as shelters for childhood, understanding children's vulnerability in order to sustain the asymmetry in our relationship with them, and thus provide children with strategies to speak out and of themselves, as Zelmanovich (2003) said.

Ramos' work stages this asymmetry creating a universe of the small, the minimal, the mild. This universe, however, is highly supportive and involves an ability to transform the world or make up new dreams when none are left.

Her texts reveal a strong commitment to a world that, however vast and alien, can always be read, allowing us—as Ramos (2006) herself says—'[to] believe that transformation is possible, to face the signs that reality is revealing itself to us'. This is an attempt to recover the way children read, which stands on a thin line that separates the known from the unknown, the tiny from the disproportionate, silence from words, life from death. This study thus attempts to explore the creases in a work that speaks about nets, and knits them using the subtle threads of language.

'What is wound in the little things of the world'

An overview of Ramos' poetic work invariably shows a set of signifiers building up a tiny, delicate, even invisible universe that, though minimal, can produce a number of sensations. For instance, there are no large trees in her forests—if any, they can only be noticed by means of their twigs, wisps, petals, leaves, seeds, or little flowers:

'All the bugs in the neighborhood are sticking their heads from behind a curtain of petals, from the sledge of a leaf, from under a seed.' (2006a: 34)

'I'll pour on it
A drop of apple flower
'Cause scents can sooth
And petals help recover.' (2008)

These elements suggest we can discover the core of a secret—the secret of nature, revealed through an innuendo of shadows, translucency, silences, and reflections. At the centre of this world lies something the size of a cricket's heart; in fact, this is the title of one of Ramos' books:



Corazón de grillo (Cricket heart), a homage to Conrado Nalé Roxlo, a writer who knew poetry and children very well. A secret this size is easier to grasp for a child who is starting to find their place in the vastness of the universe they inhabit. Ramos' secrets can be shared, and children are invited—and so are animals—to participate in the dance, open only to those who showed their treasures and let themselves be seen.

'The best thing about a secret is sharing it.' (2011)

'It may have been of white thread
The little dream she dreamt
With eyes coming and going
With secrets the two shared. (2009b: 35)

Additionally, these elements help shape a world that serves as the base for a sort of nest made of seeds, buds, feather flakes, sticks, leaves, petals. A cradle covered by a delicate little transparent sheet: the protective weightless sheet of words:

'Little balls of fluff
Knitted with branches;
Warm home for baby bird to lay...
But I'd better not say.' (2010)

Yolanda Reyes (1999) speaks precisely about 'providing a nest,' or sowing meaning for children to harvest it. The nest is the padded soft background we can all build to share with children as dwellers. It is not compact, though,

"Childhood cannot be wholly encompassed, but it can and must be received, welcomed, and nested. If we are to provide an open space for childhood, I can't think of a cosier place than a nest made of words, poems, stories, pictures, music."

but full of cracks that let light and sound in. It is roofless; it is as large as we want, need, or can afford it to be. It is protected, yet not too high for us to leave it for too long—it is a place to share with others. It is a floor to stand on or to take impulse from. After all, literature has a lot to do with flying.

Flying is also present in Ramos' texts: actual, symbolic, impossible flights by those who can't actually fly—like elephants:

'Its ears swing,
Rock, and stretch
Pretending to be wings
When nobody's watching.' (1999: 34)

Although they sometimes can:

The toad was lying:
Today, I will fly.
Then he flew away.' (2005: 22)

'She flew again and again since then. She flew every day, only to return to her world of ordinary lizards. A world where her sisters insisted every now and then: "Lizards? Lizards can't fly.'" (2001: 30)

We should build nests and dare to dwell in them with children, but also leave holes in its fabric so that doubt and uncertainty can filter in, so that more questions are raised and art and play can appear.

Elena Stapich (2008) says:

'Childhood cannot be wholly encompassed, but it can and must be received, welcomed, and nested. If we are to provide an open space for childhood, I can't think of a cosier place than a nest made of words, poems, stories, pictures, music. Perhaps art is the language of choice for building such nest, and the network that best supports children by not imprisoning them, giving them a chance to unfold instead'.

Moreover, a nest can be built with anything, with whatever we have at hand, as long as it is fuelled by the idea that a secret is wound in the small things of the world, as Ramos herself said. The doves in San Pedro are a proof of this, 'knitting nails, knitting iron'—as Laura Devetach said—to make their nests, while Mar del Plata's cathedral was being built.

'Why is it knitting wings if it walks on its feet?'

Nests are related to nets, to weaves, to fabric. Silk threads, vegetable threads—thin but highly resistant—hold together Ramos' poetics. In order to weave the fabric that can hold the world's stage, as Perla Zelmanovich (2003) says, you should be moved by desire, which involves something to be conquered. Here lies the future, and here stands the poetics of the possible, of hope, inscribed in Ramos' texts.

Consequently, for any transmission to take place between an educator and a student, the key lies in providing the latter with the necessary references and meanings that will allow them to make a difference of their own, i.e., their own words. This is where asymmetry lies: in protecting and acknowledging a child's vulnerability. Hence the need to think and act upon our current difficulties as adults in order to sustain the asymmetry for children as a background to that protective and sheltering pattern of meanings.

Yet in order to make sense of the world in one's terms, a desire to hold it together is necessary, but in turn, such desire needs to be conquered. To do so, rehearsing—which involves experiencing other people's desires, be it peers or adults—is a necessary condition. Having a glimpse of a single desire amounts to opening up to a new dimension where things to come are possible.' (Zelmanovich, 2003)

If Ramos did not believe in things to come and that this is where the social dimension lies—in the soft but hard-wearing fabric we weave with one another—we would not have known about the elephant who plans to sail a river on a boat made of leaves. Elephants are massive.

'If he was this small, / he'd sleep among the ants' green sheets, / and he'd be able to swing / from the tamarind trees.' (2004: 15)

Together, the ants use spiders' silk threads to weave a wicker twig boat for Eleazar so he can finally sail away feeling almost light and small. As long as the elephant is innocent enough, like a child, and as long as the leaves are closely interwoven, the journey will be possible:

Granny Ant knits a lovely dress for her granddaughter using vegetal threads (2009b); Gusanita (female little worm) knits wings but no one knows why and the garment she has woven looks like two petals (2009b); Her Granny doesn't know her sewing thread's the size the girl just needs to find her little dreaming eyes (2009b); The frog now spins her white silk thread to weave more dreams



when none are left (2009b).

Threads are carefully woven in order to sustain and shelter childhood, with the conviction that the fabric won't break despite people's doubts: Upon reaching the fourth elephant as she sang 'One elephant went out to play', six-year-old Candela objected 'I think the spider's web can hold up to three elephants—more elephants sounds a bit far-fetched'.

'It is never easy to read about the world of the poor'

I have decided to start this section quoting Lidia Blanco's (2000) words from 'María Cristina Ramos. Una escritura a favor de la infancia' (María Cristina Ramos. Writing on Behalf of Childhood) in connection with her narrative work: 'It is never easy to read about the world of the poor.' Azul la cordillera and Mientras duermen las piedras are not light or self-indulgent reading. Both novels deal with scarcity and need, but they are also all about life. Ramos does not avoid issues such as pain, loneliness, or injustice, but hope is also interwoven in her texts.

The novel Azul la cordillera is made up of the voices of its characters, who interact at an escuela albergue in the Andes mountain range. Children spend the whole week

at school, far away from home, sheltered by the words and emotionally charged silences of adults. The characters in Azul... talk about their lives, their fears, their wishes, their beliefs; they put into words the experience of living. Ramos herself says, while discussing reading poetry, that this takes the reader out of the paralysis of pain and into the possibility of uttering and articulating it, countering its threat by confining it to speech; that is to say, by being able to put sorrow into words, e.g., 'God should want things to change.' Azul la cordillera is a deeply moving novel that does not take pity on its characters for the things they don't have, but divides and shares what they do have:

'I say that this brother is not going to die on me—not now, not ever. And I already told Mommy that I want him to have two names, a longer one for when he becomes a grownup and a shorter one for now, so that he's not carrying around some useless letters when we call him. I already made room for him in my bedroom, but they haven't put the cradle there yet because it brings bad luck. I told Dad to make a nest in the meantime, because I figure he's going to be so small.' (2006c)

"This should be a personal reason: to visit poetry—its rhythm games, its metaphorical synthesis, its view of the world, the music at its core."

A similar procedure is followed in Mientras duermen las piedras, a story about a family and a community in poor living conditions. A lack of electricity and sometimes food are the driving force for a new project. Once again, Ramos avoids a pitiful look providing an alternative based on the creation of community networks. The novel, told from a girl's point of view, suggests that change might become possible through cooperation, solidarity, the fight for social rights, strengthening bonds among people, and—why not—happiness. According to Blanco, this attitude is based on an ethical framework in which solidarity and love become the entrance to a world where true communication and happiness are possible. This is highly significant in uninspiring or unmotivating contexts. The interesting thing about this novel is that it explores complex social issues without introducing unbearably poignant scenes or using literature to moralise or 'teach values'—it just states that everybody has the right to a better life, to happiness:

'On our way back, we played in the river for a while and, when we got back home, we finally saw something like green fluff on one of the furrows. In spite of our tiredness, in spite of our forgetfulness, in spite of my youngest brother's stomping feet, the joyful green of parsley was sprouting.' (2009a: 48)

Both novels are fragments of reality that, as Ramos says, reveal a glimpse of brightness in what's been broken, so that we can recover whatever may have been lost.

'With placid waters I end my sorrow'

If I had to describe Ramos' poetics in a few words, I would say that it is a poetics of 'ending sorrow,' since joy is present in both her poetry and her narrative work. Such joy can be found by digging in hidden places in the world, in the small things in daily life that comprise the experience of living.

A poetics of the small, the light, the imperceptible, Ramos' work holds a secret that is available to all, but especially to children who are not afraid to get their hands dirty with mud, to go into the river, to climb high on trees, or peep into trunks' holes, touching bugs or collecting petals and seeds, twigs, feathers and foam. Ramos' poetics uses diminutive forms not because she's minimising her readers, but because she knows that in order to make a difference, you need to point to asymmetries, giving children the possibility to utter their own words.

Finally, a few words from the author summarizing the ideas above:

'This should be a personal reason: to visit poetry—its rhythm games, its metaphorical synthesis, its

view of the world, the music at its core— seeking the balsamic quality of magic charms or healing words, words that help us recover from the roughness of daily life in a bright instant of play and creation, of freedom for sound and concept, to remove the anchor of gloom and bring back joy, the lightness of first flights, the amazement, the sighs we need to carry on.' (Ramos, 2006)

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* Sent to the jurors

⁴ Translator's note: These state-run schools are attended by children who live in rural areas too far away to commute. They stay at school for the week—hence their name, 'lodging schools.'

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María Cristina Ramos is a writer and literature professor. She has been the coordinator in numerous literary workshops for children, teenagers and young adults, and she is involved in teacher training. She has also coordinated the ‘Train the Trainer’ programme for coordinators of Children’s Literature Workshops for the Department of Teachers’ Training and Permanent Education in the Education Council of the Province of Neuquén, Argentina. In 1987 and 1988, she was the coordinator of the Reading and Writing Plan, which was part of the Community Libraries Department, also in the Province of Neuquén. This position required her to lead workshops in different districts around the province, as well as being in charge of the ‘Leer es salud’ programme (Reading is good for you), in small libraries and hospitals. In 2001, María Cristina was a trainer in the ‘Creating Reading Ties’ programme, organised by the National Commission of Community Libraries. Furthermore, she has collaborated with librarians in different towns in the provinces of Neuquén, Río Negro, and Mendoza.

Fundación Leer: When did you start writing for children?

María Cristina Ramos: When my first daughter was born. But truthfully, I always felt a close connection with children, since I worked as a teacher for many years. It is really moving to witness how children ‘read’ the world, and discover it little by little, as they grow up. That glow moved me into writing.

FL: Do you think we should talk about children’s literature or is it simply literature? And in any case, how would you define children’s literature?

MCR: It is important to focus on the possibilities a child has to build everything an adult reader builds when they receive a text. Of course, there are infinite nuances, but in general there is a significant gap between a child and an adult, as regards their life experiences. Anyway, children’s literature is, first and foremost, literature. The age of our target audience does not justify a superficial or sloppy treatment of the material. On the contrary, the idea is to try and delve into its artistic intent and propose an encounter with the reading experience, without patronising or underestimating our readers.

FL: In order to write stories or poetry for children, is it necessary to write about the children’s world?

MCR: No. Literature is a window to the outside world and to human beings’ inner worlds. I think children are interested in everything. They are curious and look out that window into life in all its forms. That curiosity leads them to decipher this strange thing we call ‘adulthood’.

FL: Are there topics for children and topics for adults? Can you talk about just anything when it comes to children’s literature?

MCR: Yes, writing for children entails being responsible

for what literature can generate in them, and that responsibility means that you need to be delicate and smart.

FL: How do you include topics that have to do with social exclusion or conflicts in children’s stories?

MCR: Each author develops their own alchemy. I think that it is a question of keeping a delicate balance between social awareness and aesthetic realization. Besides, I do not think writing can be purposefully channelled towards a given objective. The author’s ideology becomes apparent, even when they are writing about topics that seem to be about things other than social issues or human oppression. In any such situation, the underlying issue is that others are not considered valuable. The principle of respect for one another appears even in the most trivial communicational situations, such as a story about fish or buttons. Literature is metaphorisation. Only that, maybe, we have become used to accepting the explicit, the obvious. There is a lot of ‘consumer literature’ intended not to shake readers, not to demand an effort from them. I believe that a true artist will trust human nature and people’s power to overcome obstacles, as well as a lucid perspective and a desire for freedom. We throw our work into that sea of possibilities.

FL: Is there room in literature for the voices of different cultural stakeholders in our country?

MCR: I think there is little room, but at the same time it has become a more relevant spot, compared to years ago.

FL: Does literature have a function in that sense? I mean, if it has a concrete purpose at all...

MCR: Maybe it subtly points out, underscores, and sheds light on the grey areas. It gives a voice to the unheard, both individually and socially. The aesthetic experience strikes personal chords in us that touch upon the collective unconscious. The search for the aesthetic is an expression of freedom. Moreover, as any activity that pivots on a quest to unfold the sanest part in us, it dignifies us as human beings and it saves us from self-destruction.

FL: What is your purpose? What are your objectives when you start writing a story?

MCR: None. It is only once the story has made enough progress that I take a critical look to what’s behind the scenes, so as to see what else should get in the spotlight or left in the shadows.

FL: How much space does poetry occupy in the field of children’s literature?

MCR: Sometimes it appears timidly among other more commonly used resources. There’s a certain fear from mediators and teachers before poetry. I think it is connected to the unpredictable nature of the poetic discourse. Poetry can be an instant ray of light, a drop of music, a pure and free playfulness with words. It can be a subtle inner

Literature is a window to the outside world and to human beings’ inner worlds. I think children are interested in everything. They are curious and look out that window into life in all its forms. That curiosity leads them to decipher this strange thing we call ‘adulthood’.

resonance that evokes a time when words came from those who represented love, a time when language was made of sound and musicality, before we could get its meaning. Its contribution, however, is not equivalent to that of the narrative. You have to dare explore it, enjoy it, and make it available to children. Then, poetry takes off on its own.

FL: In your opinion, what is the place of literature at school? What should it be?

MCR: School should create spaces for children to interact with literature. Teachers who remember their own childhood or teenage years, and the intimacy that you can develop with a book you love better understand how important it is to be in close contact with books. Books

provide an opportunity to dive in them until you find something that resonates with you at a deeply personal level. When schools allow for this exploration and foster freedom, they are opening doors and broadening horizons for children to value literature, thus helping ‘build’ readers.

FL: As a teacher and a trainer, what are your specific strategies to stimulate reading in children?

MCR: Those that entail inspiring group interactions in the game of words, those that feed the idea of connecting images with words, those where literature pushes children to delve into their imagination and progressively lead into a fruitful silence that encourages reading.



Poetry burns under the sun

Mariposa de otoño (Autumn butterfly)

*The butterfly dances
and burns – with the sun – sometimes,*

*flits and flies flaring in a swirl,
now still,
on a leaf that rocks it.*

*(...)
It is past the hour of the scythe.
The sun, now, convalesced.*

*Its warm tongue enveloped me.
And then I said: “You persist.”*

*The butterfly dances,
shudders,
disappears.*

Pablo Neruda (fragment)

Translated by Robert Arnquist and William A. Sigler

<http://billsigler.blogspot.com/2009/11/autumn-butterfly.html>

*Lecture given by María Cristina Ramos on May 5,
2013, at the 2nd Forum on Children and Young
Adults’ Literature at the Knowledge Centre in the
Province of Misiones, Argentina*

Why ‘autumn butterfly’?

We receive the world from the hands of those surrounding us. The world is designed and valued according to the voices and the perspectives of those who are close to us.

Our way of looking at the world is shaped by those who define it around us in our daily lives through their way of naming, of asserting and denying; their ways of considering or disregarding, the forms in which they express love or lack of affection.

Family is an intimate territory of relationships, and it shapes our little ones. In it, children learn and they feed their curiosity; they develop skills and behaviours before they start school. Then comes the time of pencils and chalk, of lost erasers and notebooks, of eyes wide open to a blackboard horizon, of the school scenes that launch us into the adventure of literacy.

Some people say there is no time for literature, no time to read stories and poems that are distractions from what is important. What is important? For

children to learn how to read and write, they say. Is literature really a detour from what’s important? Let’s give that a second thought.

Our perspective of the world keeps broadening, expanding, deepening, thanks to this live trail that is literature. Literature is a space where the author’s imagination meets children’s craving for imagery; it allows for children to become birds or inhabit a little corner where anything is possible. That space where fears and desires float, where there are characters that dare navigate uncharted waters, is and will be the indispensable sounding board to renew the desire to read. It is also a balm to mellow individual efforts made in order to read and write.

Reading out loud creates harmony, it cheers you up—it is a caress that shelters you. An important person in their lives—such as a teacher—reading out loud to children builds trust, consolidates ties, brings closeness and unites.

Even more to that point, frequent contact with the literary language contributes to enhance communicational skills, awakens verbal tools that sustain thought and imagination, and benefits group interaction by adding expressive nuances. Literature is also a platform for exploration to know and design the boundaries of our own subjectivity.

Our voice should be the best call for children, an irresistible invitation to delve into the world of reading. We need to muster all the expressiveness we are capable of: our skill to whisper, to exclaim, to use an appealing intonation for questions. During the breaks at school, in the teachers’ lounge, our voices grow small to whisper secrets or grow big to proclaim expectations, and those are the voices that read out loud. Sometimes those voices become dull and reluctant, as if they were detached from their inner fruitfulness. These countless possible nuances heard during the breaks at school should be available when it comes to reading.

It is true that poems have a core that contains their meaning, sustained by a fabric of images, metaphors and other rhetorical devices. The suggestions that lead to that meaning are scattered throughout their rhythmic structure: in the words chosen, in what each word evokes, in how one word is woven into the next one, how they are bound together by syntax, and in how language resources lend themselves to



Since the beginning of time, poetry has healed the wounds of the body and the soul. Accompanying readers into the world of poetry not only means enabling them to exercise the right to pleasure, but also implies generating encounters with the best in our literary cultural tradition.

the poetic quest. If we read a text intended to be soft in a hasty or rough manner, the text will lose those features.

A poem creates a special world endowed with a meaning, but it is also a sound unit, which contains a rhythmic structure, a musical beat, and a stream of cadences that leave a trace in children's memories.

That's why, in the light of the text's content, as readers we should try and find the most adequate tone to convey its meaning, and relish the words, with their consonant clusters and their vowel valleys. We can discover how fast to read a given stanza, and how slow to utter another one, how to play on speed to evoke the sensations that the poem suggests.

We read when we come back from the bottom of the text immersed in its meaning, which is built between the words' pulse and our sensitivity. We read when the air in our breath can touch the text without hurting it. We read when we place ourselves between the text and our listeners, and we are able to blur our individuality to generate a space for meaning to keep resonating. We read when the flow of our voice is tempered, acknowledging low voices as part of a repertoire of intensities. We read when our voice pulses with the intent to share a ray of light, and chooses the right feathers so that poetry takes to the sky.'

Reading Sana que sana (There, there): A healing process

Since the beginning of time, poetry has healed the wounds of the body and the soul. Accompanying readers into the world of poetry not only means enabling them to exercise the right to pleasure, but also implies generating encounters with the best in our literary cultural tradition.

Human beings have always found that poetry brings comfort at different times in our personal history, and supports our ontological, social or sentimental musings. Human beings have always become one with the words of those who have mastered poetry and bequeathed to us its precious legacy.

Some school practices have impoverished the experience of poetry, by mistaking it for rhymed

text. A bunch of rhyming words does not necessarily constitute poetry. Any of us can play with rhyme, but poetry is more than that.

Poetry creates a world that attracts and mesmerises, that gives and demands an emotional response and a thought from the reader. Something is poetry when it echoes in our sensitivity, when it triggers a thought that starts organising itself, a thought that attaches more meanings and questions to our daily experience, and to what our surroundings propose. Something is poetry if it provides readers with a singular, secret answer to questions of poetic logic or an emotional, playful, rhythmic, or absurd nature. (...)

Poetic language is a privileged language that makes it possible to integrate what needs to be named in our inner world in order to find the balance that our personal reality requires.

The multifaceted and flexible nature of poetry makes room for the emotional dimension that defines us as humans, as well as our subjectivity to view the world from a unique perspective, which brings together perception, emotion, knowledge and imagination. Putting discoveries, pain, joy, hope, doubt, and the vicissitudes of our emotional world into words is the function of the poetic.

Becoming poetry readers will help us tell what happens, describe the experiences in our lives, talk about our affectionate side, follow our meandering thoughts and decipher what our imagination builds around everyday mysteries.

Poetry is the dimension where we can approach our most human profiles. It helps us undergo healthy experiences and open a space for encountering our own true self and others, a space to transcend and recover from a fall.

A poetic text is a different verbal territory, a fabric that produces sensations and resonances that could be perceived in many different ways.

Memoirs of an encounter

Some time ago, I participated in an event with readers at Community Library 9 de Julio in San Martín de los Andes, in the Argentine Patagonia. The gathering was organized with children from



different schools who had read some of my books. Considering that they were between 6 and 12 years of age, I decided to read a poem called 'El gallo azul' (The blue rooster).

The event was particularly moving, since the children's teacher had generated a lot of expectations and the children's eagerness to hear was symbolized by a respectful silence, eyes wide open, a whisper here and there, and a few fugitive sighs. There were some adults too, namely parents, reading coordinators, and librarians.

I read the poem the way I like to do it: going from the text to their eyes and back, refreshed by the feeling of being in that point of the mountain range that Patagonian ibises choose to perch.

When I came to the end of the poem, I stopped and looked at them. Silence. One moment, two... At some point a 6-year old girl raised her hand calmly and left it hanging in mid-air.

'I didn't understand,' she said.

'Ok... There are many ways to understand a poem, but if you want, we can read it again. Would you like

that, children?'

They all agreed. I read it again. Silence. The same girl raised her hand again:

'I did not understand this time either.'

I attempted an explanation:

'Let's see... when we read a short story, we can retell that story, but when we read a poem, we receive it in a different way. Maybe, what we get is a bunch of words, a few lines, and a sensation or a feeling. Also, each of us may receive something different. Can anybody share what they understood, and see if you can help our little friend?'

Many hands rose. A boy, who was around ten, said in an utterly confident voice:

'The thing is that the rooster had a problem: he was blue. So he couldn't find a girlfriend. That's why he decided to go up the roof and turn into a weathercock.' The girl listened to him in absolute earnest and asked again:

'And he stayed there, all alone?'

At this point the silence was like a snow avalanche and brought us all together in perplexity, in awe,

A poem creates a special world endowed with a meaning, but it is also a sound unit, which contains a rhythmic structure, a musical beat, and a stream of cadences that leave a trace in children's memories.

and possibly in pain. What should I do to break this silence? How could I go on? As a shrewd teacher, experience tells me that silence has to be treasured too, so I waited. Another boy with curly hair and wind-kissed cheeks, who was around 6, stood up and proclaimed:

'No! He was blue so he went up the roof to look further so that he could find a hen that is blue, just like him...'

I was happy then and I am happy now, remembering what happened in that gathering. I am pleased to see that I knew better and waited for the girl's question to resonate with the group and find its path.

It is possible to analyse reading through what those children expressed. At first, the girl tormented by the ending of the poem was the only one that captured the deep meaning of what was not said in the poem, because the poem points out to being different and to loneliness as its consequence. What did she mean when she said 'I did not understand' in this context? Did she mean 'I didn't understand the text' or 'I don't understand how someone can tell a story with that ending'? At her age, a desirable ending is a happy ending, which provides compensation. However, as we know, not every story has a happy ending.

On the other hand, the other children contributed in their own way. The first one did not perceive the ending as a conflict, staying on the roof was fine for him. The other boy, on the contrary, did perceive the idea of loneliness, but found a possible resolution to avoid getting upset about a character that is different from the rest and therefore has to endure loneliness. Literary reading unleashes scenes that are as intense as this one. From them, we get glimpses of the meaning that provides guidance in the complex and progressive construction of each reader's individual subjectivity.

If we give in to the temptation of hastily intervening and fail to yield the space for the text and each listener's world to come in contact, part of what is dormant in the text will not be realised.

Mediators are the ones who prepare the scene for

that encounter to happen: they select the book and the occasion, they offer their voice and sensitivity, they move as tightrope walkers between silence and words. They make themselves available for children to ask questions and wait for them to take the steps to discovery at their own pace, illuminated by literature. Any mediator who accompanies and follows the steps of someone venturing into the world of reading is giving back a part of what life gave them—the bright arch stretching from intensity to subtlety. They are sharing a spark that will give birth to the instant when a reader embraces a book and becomes a bird or a coati or a seafarer, getting lost and finding the stories that sustain our culture and weave into the dynamics of language, its essence and its excellence. Reading is building yourself, from intimate corners to faraway shores, following the subtle revelation shaping us, turning our eyes to the mystery of what we are and the hope of what we can be.

We can give books and instil a desire to read, but readers are the ones who conquer what lies beyond, in a faraway horizon that is unique to each of us and our subjectivity.



- First prize in Poetry in the literary contest ‘Leopoldo Marechal’, in the region of Cuyo. 1975
- Honourable mention for *Las lagartijas no vuelan* in the Antoniorrobes Latin American contest organised by IBBY México. 1990
- First prize for *De coronas y galeras* in the Antoniorrobes Latin American contest organised by IBBY México. 1991
- ALIJA Honour List 1991 for *Un sol para tu sombrero*
- Destacados ALIJA Award (for outstanding books, writers, illustrators and publishing houses selected by ALIJA, the Argentinian IBBY National section) for *Azul la cordillera* (Blue, the mountain chain). Category: Text. 1996
- Finalist at the Norma-Fundalectura Children and Young People Latin American Literature Awards in Colombia, for the book *De barrio somos* (Our neighbourhood). 1997
- Winner of the Children’s Fantasy National Award in the category of Poetry for the book *Un bosque en cada esquina*, Sponsored by UNICEF, the Argentinian Secretariat of Culture, Asociación Argentina de Lectura (Argentine Reading Association) and other institutions. 1997
- Honour List in San Miguel de Tucumán Secretariat of Culture for *Del amor nacen los ríos*. Province of Tucumán, Argentina. 1998
- Destacados ALIJA Award for *Del amor nacen los ríos*. Category: Recreation of oral texts. 2000
- Pregonero a Especialista award for promoting children’s literature, by Fundación El libro. 2002
- Finalist in the 3rd International Anaya Award for *Mientras duermen las piedras* (While the stones sleep). 2006.
- Destacados ALIJA Award for *La escalera*. Category: Poetry. 2009
- Destacados ALIJA Honourable Mention for *La luna lleva un silencio* (The moon holds silence). Category: Poetry. 2010
- Lola Mora Award for Outstanding Women in Culture by Neuquén Legislature. Argentina. 2010.
- La hormiguita viajera Children and Young Adults National and Latin American Literature Award for National Educator in Literature for Children and Young Adults. 2014
- Destacados ALIJA Award for *Dentro de una palabra*. Category: Poetry. 2014
- 12th Ibero-American SM Award for Children and Young Adults’ Award. 2016



'The ink was fresh, so I read on tiptoe.'

María Cristina Ramos
 From *La secreta sílaba del beso*
 (*The Secret Syllable of Kiss*)



BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS



Un sol para tu sombrero (A sun for your hat)
 (Buenos Aires, Libros del quirquincho, 1988)
 (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1999)



Cuentos de la Buena Suerte (Tales of good luck)
 (Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 1991)
 (Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2011)



De papel te espero (Made of waiting-for-you paper)
 (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1991)
 (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2011)



El árbol de la lluvia (The rain tree)
 (Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 1993)
 (Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 1997)



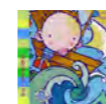
Azul la cordillera (Blue the mountain chain)
 (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1995)
 (Buenos Aires, Norma, 2006)
 (Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2017)



El libro de Ratonio (The book of Mousiebald)
 (Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 1995)
 (Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2014)



De barrio somos (Our neighbourhood)
 (Buenos Aires/Bogotá, Norma, 1997)
 (Buenos Aires, Planeta, 2017)



Un bosque en cada esquina (A forest on every corner)
 (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1997)



Ruedamares, Pirata de la mar bravía (Ruedamares, a pirate of the raging sea)
 (Bogotá, Norma, 1997)
 (Buenos Aires, Norma, 2006)
 (Buenos Aires, Siete Vacas, 2007)
 (Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2017)



Del amor nacen los ríos (From love are rivers born)
 (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1998)



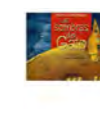
Belisario y el violín (Belisario and the violin)
 (Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 1999)
 (Buenos Aires, Loqueleo, 2016)



Las lagartijas no vuelan (Lizards can't fly)
 (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2001)



Cuentos del bosque (Tales from the forest)
 (Buenos Aires, Santillana, 2001)
 (Neuquén, Editorial Ruedamares, 2013)



Las sombras del Gato (The cat's shadows)
 (Bogotá, Panamericana editorial, 2002)



Maíces de silencio (Kernels of silence)
 (Neuquén, Editorial Ruedamares, 2002)
 (Madrid, SM, 2018)



Corazón de grillo (Cricket heart)
 (Neuquén, Editorial Ruedamares, 2002)



Belisario y los espejos de agua (Belisario and the water mirrors)
 (Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 2003)
 (Buenos Aires, Loqueleo, 2017)



Eleazar y el río (Eleazar and the river)
 (Buenos Aires, Ediciones Edebé, 2004)



La rama de azúcar (The sugar branch)
 (Buenos Aires, Santillana, 2004)
 (Córdoba, Comunicarte, 2013)



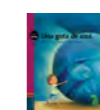
Papelitos (Little pieces of paper)
 (México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2005)



La luna lleva un silencio (The moon holds silence)
 (Madrid, Anaya, 2005)
 (Buenos Aires, Anaya Aique Grupo Editor, 2010)



Bareos en la lluvia (Boats in the rain)
 (México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007)



Historias de hormiguero (Tales from the ant's nest)
 (Buenos Aires, Siete Vacas, 2007)



Mi mano (My hand)
(México, CIDCLI, 2007)



Una mapirisa risa que riza (A brew betterfly that fries)
(México/ Barcelona, Océano Travesía, 2008)



Sana que sana (There, there)
(México / Barcelona, Océano Travesía, 2008)



Gato que duerme (Sleeping cat)
(México / Barcelona, Océano Travesía, 2008)



Rondas del agua (Water songs)
(México, Nostra Ediciones, 2009)



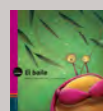
Mientras duermen las piedras (While the stones sleep)
(Buenos Aires, Edelvives, 2009)



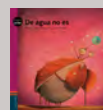
La escalera (The ladder)
(Buenos Aires, Edelvives, 2009)



Patitas y alas (Wings and little legs)
(Neuquén, Editorial Ruedamares, 2010)
(México, SM, 2018)



El baile (The dance)
(Buenos Aires, Edelvives, 2011)



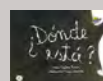
De agua no es (Not made of water)
(Buenos Aires, Edelvives, 2011)



Belisario y los fantasmas (Belisario and the ghosts)
(Buenos Aires, Alfaguara, 2012)
(Buenos Aires, Loqueleo, 2016)



Los días de Guille (Guille's days)
(Buenos Aires, Tinta Fresca Ediciones, 2012)



¿Dónde está? (Where is He?)
(Buenos Aires, Macmillan, 2012)



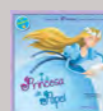
Pétalo de nube (Cloud petal)
(Buenos Aires, Macmillan, 2012)



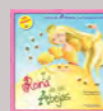
Emilia y la zapatilla perdida (Emilia and the lost trainer)
(Buenos Aires, Artemisa, 2012)



El rey y la rebelión de las margaritas (The king and the rebellion of the daisies)
(Buenos Aires, Artemisa, 2012)



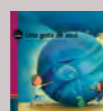
La princesa de papel (The paper princess)
(Buenos Aires, Artemisa, 2012)



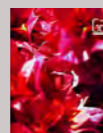
La reina de las abejas (The bee queen)
(Buenos Aires, Artemisa, 2012)



Encantado, dijo el sapo (Pleased to meet you, said the toad)
(Córdoba, Comunicarte, 2012)



Una gota de azul (A drop of blue)
(Buenos Aires, Edelvives, 2013)



El trasluz (Up to the light)
(Buenos Aires, SM, 2013)



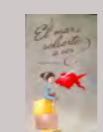
De coronas y galeras (Of crowns and top-hats)
(Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2013)
(México, SM, 2018)



Caminaditos (Little long walks)
(Madrid, Los cuatro azules, 2013)



Desierto de mar y otros poemas (Sea desert and other poems)
(Buenos Aires, SM, 2013)



El mar de volverte a ver (The sea of seeing you again)
(Buenos Aires, Quipu, 2014)



Dentro de una palabra (Inside a word)
(Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2014)



Cordelia y los arañijos (Cordelia and the spiderchildren)
(Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2015)



El rey que no sabía soñar (The king who could not dream)
(Buenos Aires, Edebé, 2015)



Náufragos (Castaways)
(Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2015)



Alamito en la creciente (Little poplar in the flood)
(Buenos Aires, Edebé, 2016)



Duraznos (Peaches)
(Buenos Aires, Quipu, 2016)



Grulla en el recreo (Crane at break)
(Buenos Aires, Planeta, 2017)



Para llegar hasta el sol (To reach the sun)
(Buenos Aires, Loqueleo, 2018)

BOOKS FOR ADULTS



La secreta sílaba del beso (The secret syllable of kiss)
(Neuquén, Editorial Ruedamares, 2003)
(Neuquén, Editorial Ruedamares, 2009)



En un claro del mundo (In a clearing in the world)
(Neuquén, Editorial Ruedamares, 2012)

BOOKS FOR TEACHERS AND READING PROMOTERS



Aproximación a la narrativa y a la poesía para niños. Los pasos descalzos (An approach to narrative and poetry for children. The barefoot steps)
(Buenos Aires, Lugar editorial, 2012)



La casa del aire, Literatura en la escuela. Nivel Inicial y Primer ciclo (The house in the air. Literature at school, kindergarten and 1st to 3rd grades)
(Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2013)



La casa del aire, Literatura en la escuela. Segundo y tercer ciclo (The house in the air. Literature at school. 4th to 10th grades)
(Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2013)



La casa del aire. Taller literario (The house in the air. Literary workshop)
(Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2018)

THE TEN MOST IMPORTANT TITLES BY THE CANDIDATE

Un sol para tu sombrero (Poems)

Buenos Aires, Libros de quirquincho, 1988.
Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1999.

Azul la cordillera (Novel)

Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1995.
Buenos Aires, Norma, 2006.
Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2017.

Ruedamares, pirata de la mar bravía (Novel)

Bogotá, Norma, 1997.
Buenos Aires, Norma, 2006.
Buenos Aires, Siete Vacas, 2007.
Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2017.

La luna lleva un silencio (Poems)

Madrid, Anaya, 2005.
Buenos Aires, Aique, 2009.

De coronas y galeras (Short story)

Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2013.
México, SM, 2018.

Una maripisa risa que riza (Poems)

México/ Barcelona, Océano Travesía, 2008.
Korea Schweitzer, 2008.
San Pablo, Nova Alexandria publishing house, 2009.

Sana que sana (Poems)

México/ Barcelona, Océano Travesía, 2008.
Seoul, Youngkyo, 2008.
Hanshian Culture Publishing Corporation, Taiwan, 2008.

Mientras duermen las piedras (Novel)

stones sleep
Buenos Aires, Edelvives, 2009.

Maíces de silencio (Poems)

Neuquén, Ruedamares Publishing House, 2002.
Madrid, SM, 2018.

Patitas y alas (Short stories)

Neuquén, Ruedamares publishing house, 2010.
México, SM, 2018.



TRANSLATED BOOKS

Korea

Sana que sana
Youngkyo, 2008.

Una maripisa risa que riza
Korea Schweitzer, 2008.

China

Sana que sana
Hanshian Culture Publishing Corporation, Taiwan, 2008.

Brazil

Una maripisa risa que riza
Editora Nova Alexandria, 2013.
Translated by Valentina Cayota
Adapted by Penélope Martins

Eleazar y el río
Editorial Salesiana, 2006.
Translated by Flávia Savary

FIVE TITLES SUBMITTED TO THE JURY

‘María Cristina Ramos’ production is characterised principally by recreating the voices and thoughts of childhood. Through a careful selection of poetic words, she binds together with subtle threads the everyday speech of children and her deep poetic voice, a voice that flies off to create fantastic settings in regions that are seldom visited by people from the big cities. Nature is part of her stories, bringing credibility through a discourse that feeds from fresh air, little puddles, and leafy trees. Children wander freely, barefoot or wearing trainers, coming in and out of their homes, and their lives fold and unfold nourished by Neuquén’s beautiful landscape. Their talks, dreams, falls, and conflicts raise from the generosity of a nature that offers adventures and builds the realistic background from which the fantastic emerges in triumph.’

Lidia Blanco

Specialist in Literature for Children and Young Adults

FIVE-BOOK LIST



Azul la cordillera = Blue, the mountain chain

(Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1995)
(Buenos Aires, Norma, 2006)
(Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2017)



De barrio somos = Our neighborhood

(Buenos Aires/Bogotá, Norma, 1997)
(Buenos Aires, Planeta, 20017)



Maíces de silencio = Kernels of silence

(Neuquén, Editorial Ruedamares, 2002)
(Madrid, SM, 2018)



La luna lleva un silencio = The moon holds silence

(Madrid, Anaya, 2005)
(Buenos Aires, Anaya Aique Grupo Editor, 2010)



Mientras duermen las piedras = While the stones sleep

(Buenos Aires, Edelvives, 2009)



‘Reading is woven with the inner world of the reader, the edges of existing concepts, the underlying sentiments that haven’t yet been named, the excitement of our own questions. Reading walks barefoot into our inner yards, taming threatening shadows, setting up a castle with a bridge that leads to certainty, moving the moat aside to cultivate a new field of doubts; reading adds ladders for a new search. The reader is wonderfully bound to hundreds of presences that sustain culture, though completely alone, accompanied by a voice that wanders with someone else’s solitude.’

María Cristina Ramos

*Aproximación a la narrativa y a la poesía para niños. Los pasos descalzos
(An Approach to Narrative and Poetry for Children. The Barefoot Steps)*



**Azul la cordillera
(Blue, the mountain chain)**

Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1995. Cover art by MagdiKeliseg.
Buenos Aires, Norma, 2006. Illustrations by Mónica Weiss.
Neuquén, Ruedamares, 2017. Illustrations by Guillermo Haidr.

Life in a precarious school on the Andes Mountain Range, children living far away from their homes: The scenes weave in rural experiences with the secrets of life, where school is a space for confluence. From afar, the mountain range is blue—that blue is the colour of distance, the teacher says, and he is also evoking other distances that isolate many other corners in the mountain landscape. Special mention in the Text Category, awarded by ALIJA, in 1996.

Review of Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain), written by Marcela Carranza, and published by Imaginaria magazine (www.imaginaria.com.ar) on March 1, 2006.

Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain) tells us a story about a place, and about a way of looking at that place.

The narrative is composed by the different voices of the protagonists: a boy who crosses the mountains to his stay-in school; the Mapuche woman who, as a member of the indigenous people of the region, does not forget she is the owner of that land; the teachers, the cleaning lady, an illiterate woman. We get to know them through their thoughts, their memories, their words. Each character describes themselves; they talk about the landscape that surrounds them, and often they build themselves through their own poetic imagery. Thus, they jump out of the page and sit next to the reader. Unlike the "tourist reader" who just observes the landscapes, its exotic inhabitants and folkloric objects and leaves, in Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain), the character and the reader look at each other's eyes.

The mountain range is the stage for social and cultural differences, and within that space, there is

another, small universe: the school. In it, children, parents, teachers, the cook live together, and we get to participate in that community life, which is the backdrop for encounters and learnings. Mind you, it is not only the children who do the learning, but also the teacher discovers the true meaning of his mission.

‘And I did not move, to continue looking at that bright little face as understanding dawned on her, as she was dazzled by discovery. (...) After that, I did not move, even though my pen fell to the floor, because my heart was pounding so hard I could not utter a single word. And she knew, and turned around to hold my face in her friendly hands and she gave me a hug. I felt I had just made my debut as a teacher, and I knew I was at the right place, the only place where I was supposed to be.’

The narrative tries to be as close to the spoken word of the mountain range inhabitants as possible, to the point of making those silenced voices heard. There is no boundary between prose and poetry in this book: it can stop on the verge of a tear swinging in the abyss of a child's sleeve, or at the river's voice pounding on your heart. In Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain) there is no haste in the narrative pace, since the 'how' is an essential part of 'what' is being told.

‘From the hill, the house seemed to be lying asleep. It looked small, like a crammed little kitten.’

Recommended for children from 11 years old, and older.

*About Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain) by María Cristina Ramos
Text read at the book presentation at the Buenos Aires International Book Fair, Buenos Aires, April 1995.*

Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain) is a novel written for children and teenagers, built on the basis of oral expressions. These spoken utterances point to the margins in two ways: because they come from a region at the border of Argentina, and



because they are pronounced by characters that live in precariousness and isolation, and have to climb mountains and cover huge distances, or stay-in far from their families to attend school.

These pages collect silenced voices, bits and pieces of a counter-history of that dispossession euphemistically known as 'Campaña del Desierto' (Conquest of the Desert).

These pages unveil moving scenes as the one about the rookie teacher in "Deletrearte" (The Art of Spelling) who contemplates in awe the twinkle in her student's eye, dazzled by the discovery of knowledge as the little girl reads her first sentence ever.

These pages also illuminate fragments of the Mapuche culture, such as the legend of Nahuel, a mythical figure—half human, half tiger—who helped José's grandfather, guiding him to safety when the old man got lost in the mountains in the middle of a storm.

Structurally, María Cristina Ramos' novel contains 14 stand-alone short stories, told by different characters who are part of a small community in a town in the middle of the Andean Mountain Range. It is precisely that structure that makes it so interesting, since there are virtually no unifying elements of the type that would be traditionally expected in a novel, such as a single plot line, or an introduction, middle and end, which provide a progressive, cohesive, linear direction to the narrative, in particular with an omniscient narrator.

On the contrary, in Azul la cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain) the narrative fragments are scattered (in fact, they could be read in a different order), not tied to a strict, progressive and linear order, and above all, they do not follow the pattern

of a single phonological enunciation, but their materiality emerges from a choral discourse format, where the characters contribute their stories, their thoughts, their musings and their memories. It is a shared fabric that may seem to mimic the technique of the loom, where multiple colours are woven in horizontally across the tapestry's vertical lines.

Apart from this special labour of love with words, reproducing cadences and turns of phrase that come from the real people's use of language, it seems that the cohesive element that binds the novel together is the convergence of these individual discourses into one single shape that represents the whole constellation of an integrated community and their ties of solidarity, as in a mosaic or kaleidoscope. The narrative unit recovered at the end when you finish reading the book is the one underscoring the community bond present in the aboriginal culture.

I believe that the purpose of this novel is to connect us with a significant part of our identity, by means of words acting as a 'bridge'—as in the title of the last chapter—to cross over leaving discrimination and intolerance behind, a utopia of integration through the communion of literature.

Gustavo Lespada[1]

Nota al pie:

[1] Gustavo Lespada has a PhD in Literature from the University of Buenos Aires. He won the Juan Rulfo Award in 2003, for his literary essay on Radio Francia Internacional – UNESCO Archives Collection. He is a researcher and lecturer, teaching Latin American Literature at the School of Literature and Philosophy at the University of Buenos Aires.



**Maíces de silencio
(Kernels of Silence)**

Neuquén, Ruedamares publishing house,
2002. Illustrations by Carlos Juárez.
Madrid, SM, 2018. Illustrations by Sandra
de la Prada.

The author offers a delightful and fun ride in a book about fish and ants, about flying and about dancing. This book is a collection of twelve fresh and beautiful poems for small children that have the power of instantly getting readers in a good mood.

Review of Maíces de silencio (Kernels of Silence), written by Germán Machado, and published in a blog under the name Garabatos y Ringorranos (mailto:https://machadolens.wordpress.com/) on September 26, 2018.

Maíces de silencio (Kernels of Silence): A jolly bellyful of poems to be eaten one by one

Let's imagine a rural scene for a moment: we are out in the sun, on a nurturing, dusty stretch of land, a hen walks by, easy like a Sunday morning, picking corn kernels here and there. She walks peacefully, no haste. Her head goes up and down as she pecks, every time she conquers a golden kernel, and another one, and another one. She eats them one by one. And she gets plump and happy.

This scene could be an apt metaphor to illustrate what reading this poetry book titled Maíces de silencio (Kernels of Silence) means, because readers go calmly poem by poem, page after page through these charming minimalistic stanzas that break the still instant to fly away into the haunting eternity of silence.

Readers will read these poems little by little, maybe out loud, and then there will be silence. Readers will dive into the pages, their heads going up and down, as if pecking on the verses, only to stop and digest each luminous kernel, conquered through reading. Poetry also suggests this way of reading. The poems created by María Cristina Ramos in her

book invite us to salute the invisible, the elusive, that which lacks the material soundness of the protagonist uttered words, but embodies the agonistic presence that is dormant in the silence of thought and imagination, of that which is left unspoken:

Inside this fishbowl,
one, two, and three,
two fishes are swimming
the third one, no one sees.
Is it a moonfish,
a paperfish may be?
Curtains of seaweed,
move back so I can see!
'How are you doing?'
the fish say as they meet
But I say hello
to the one no one sees.
Inside this fishbowl,
one, two, and three.

Many a time I have complained of authors who abuse popular poetry forms when it comes to writing for children. The rigid forms that demand minor verses and obvious rhymes seem to be the gold standard in children's poetry. I have complained because, more often than not, the form becomes a void that underscores the childish nature of nursery rhymes, in detriment of the literary content of the poem. And so, I actually complain about the lack of poetry. Perhaps my complaint has been construed as a complete rejection for this kind of traditional poetry. Alas, no. I find it wonderful when I read a poet like María Cristina Ramos, who builds her poems with impeccable formal precision, and at the same time is capable of focusing on the poem's core, making it glow, like a golden corn kernel for the hen who is pecking here and there and is seeking under the sun to see.

That is what I found in this book containing 12 poems for first time readers. Each brief poem takes up four pages in the book, as follows:
-A double page printed on a solid colour with the title of the poem and a detailed illustration;



Interior, pages 8-9, title of the poem: De sol (Of Sunshine)

-Another double page with the text of the poem and a general illustration.



Interior, pages 10-11, text of the poem

The illustrations by Sandra de la Prada are hand-painted in lively colours, in acrylic and wax, practically without contour lines, and they convey an air of freedom that plays, in turn, upon the interpretation of the poems, as if the illustrations contained a narrative element to them. They go from detailed illustrations in the first double page to general illustrations in the double page where you read the poem. In each case, this pause between coloured pages offers a respite, a moment to linger on reading,, reinforcing the idea of entering each poem as if pecking through the book, picking poems and silences here and there, like round and nurturing corn kernels. The book has just been published by Editorial SM, a publishing house from Spain (September 2018), recovering a previous Ruedamares edition that the author launched in Argentina, in 2003.



Review of Maíces de silencio (Kernels of Silence), written by Sandra Comino, and published by Revista Planetario - La guía de los chicos magazine.

Maíces de silencio (Kernels of Silence) is a book for children who are learning how to read. Author María Cristina Ramos lives in Neuquén (Patagonia, Argentina) and is well known for her poetry books—Un sol para tu sombrero (A Sun for your Hat) and Un bosque en cada esquina (Woods in Every Corner), published by Sudamérica—as well as her narrative books —Cuentos de la buena suerte (Good Luck Stories/Tales of Good Luck), published by Alfaguara, De barrio somos (Our neighbourhood), published by Norma, and Azul la Cordillera (Blue, the mountain chain), published by Sudamericana, among others.

The book is illustrated by Carlos Juárez, another Patagonia inhabitant who is the perfect companion to María Cristina's poems. The illustrations are collage work in colour paper, newspaper, candy wrappers and threads, a true craft equivalent to the author's artistry with words:

The river flows by / and a bridge crosses over, / and on top of the bridge / someone's very thirsty. They sat in the shade, / they sipped iced tea / and one big drop / of cold black coffee. / The little spider climbs down / her delicate thread, / because under the bridge / she knows / the river flows by / and the bridge crosses over, / and on top of the bridge / someone's very thirsty.

To enjoy with the whole family.



La luna lleva un silencio

Madrid, Anaya, 2005. Illustrations by Paula Alenda.

Buenos Aires, Anaya Aique Grupo Editor, 2010. Illustrations by Paula Alenda.

This book is a poetic quest that delves into life's mysteries without losing the harmonious and playful sonority of children's poetry. Nature appears sometimes as a conciliatory element and sometimes as a hazard. In many of these texts poetic questions are involved that can be food for thought and a trigger to readers' sensitivity.

This book received a Special Mention in the Poetry Category in the Alija Awards 2010.

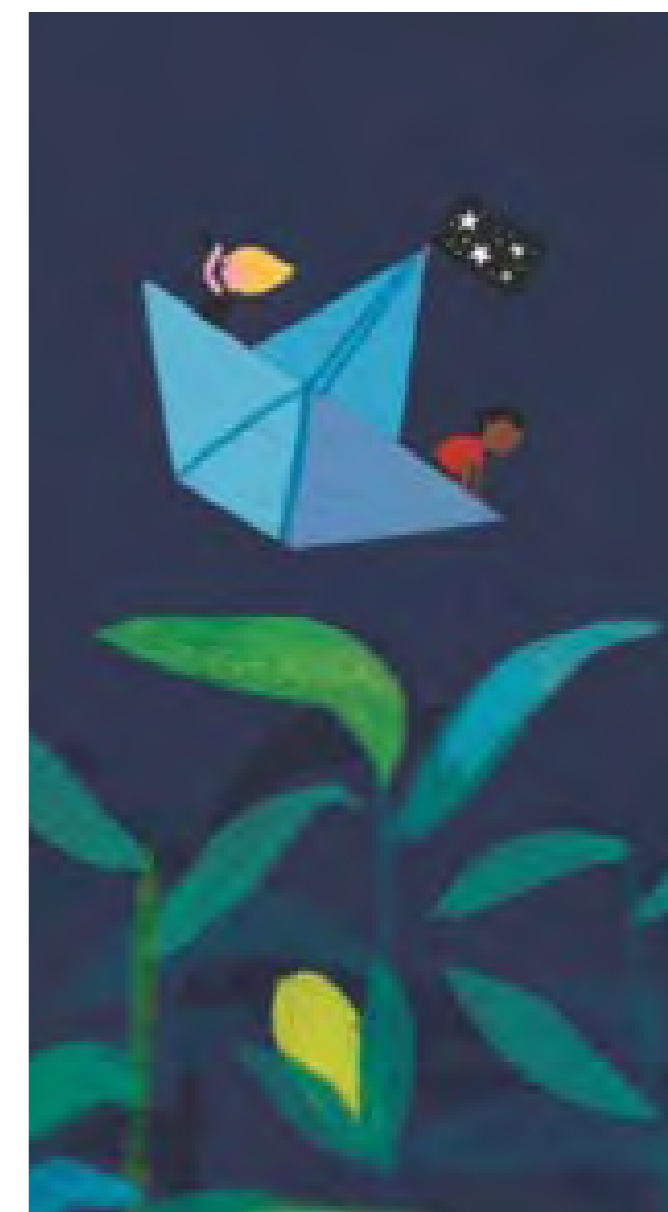
Review of La luna lleva un silencio (The Moon Holds Silence), written by Gabriel García de Oro, published in Babar magazine (www.revistababar.com) on November 29, 2005.

I would normally start my review of this book, which I cannot put down, by telling you that it is a poetry book for children. However, when I first discovered María Cristina Ramos Guzmán (and I say 'first discovered' because it is a well-known fact that writers are discovered and rediscovered several times; the more times, the better), I reaffirmed a few considerations. First of all, children's literature is a genre on its own right. Stating otherwise would be as foolish as considering that detective stories are stories for detectives. Children's literature as a genre can be enjoyed by anyone, including children, of course.

Secondly, the book is worth its weight in lines. Poetry is poetry, and children have no issue with it. It is often adults who find issue with it, and we should be thankful that publishing house Anaya has refused to join the ranks of the latter. Also, children are not only thrilled about anything that sounds like a poem, they really get it. And this book sounds and smells like poetry. It smells like rain and sun, it sounds like sand and sea, it contains the tension of opposites that generates a creative force; it is a force that emerges

from the chaos of a poetic universe where the sun and the rain jump from verse to verse, where words glistening with renewed beauty can be discovered. María Cristina Ramos is not limited by form; she uses form in a way that serves sound and music, and suddenly you understand why in some shopping malls books are placed next to the CDs.

Very good debut of Paula Alenda, as an illustrator. Her work suggests, since her drawings emerge from the page as timid shapes with shy contours. There are no sharp lines. Paula Alenda politely asks for permission to come in, and hers is an ideal complement to this delicate work that can be enjoyed by children and detectives alike.





Mientras duermen las piedras
(While the stones sleep) Madrid,
Buenos Aires, Edelvives, 2009.

Three children and their mother are living in poverty. They have neighbours who surround their daily lives with solidarity and affection. These characters are capable of imagining a way out in the face of unfair situations. These children can tackle tough circumstances without losing the joy needed to grow up.

Finalist in the Third Edition of the International Anaya Award for Children's Literature

Review of Mientras duermen las piedras (While the stones sleep), written by Alejandra Moglia, published in the blog La memoria y el sol (Memory and the Sun) (www.lamemoriayelsol.wordpress.com) on March 9, 2013.

'Silence was an invisible bell you could use to imagine everything.' María Cristina Ramos, in *Mientras duermen las piedras (While the stones sleep)*.

Mientras duermen las piedras (While the stones sleep) is a novel written by María Cristina Ramos, and published by Edelvives in 2011, as part of their Alandar collection.

The novel deals with the issue of poverty and everything that it entails, as well as coping strategies to overcome tough situations.

Her view on the topic contains a social perspective, but the author mainly approaches the issue from an aesthetic perspective, where the literary devices used force the reader to surrender to the text, to reading, to the words' particular music. We are faced with a very well-crafted language, enriched with a careful appeal to beauty.

The narrative is told through the voice of a little called Lucía, and through her, we hear other voices –her siblings', her mother's, her grandma's, her teacher's.

Lidia Blanco says that 'María Cristina Ramos' work has an essential trait: the recreation of children's voices and thoughts.' Lucía, the protagonist, tells us the story of a period in her life when she and her family, and the community where they live experience different situations connected to loss, deprivation, sadness, joy, fears, dreams, projects, wishes and unfair circumstances such as unemployment and a black out that leaves them all in the dark.

This little girl, who lives with her mother and her siblings in a very humble house by the river, speaks tenderly about what she learns about life through words, and how she builds her own story to understand her surroundings and the events that take place in her circle.

Carlos Silveyra points out that 'we could say that María Cristina Ramos draws a picture with words.' This particular feature of her work is very present in this book. Lucía talks and paints the nature of her surroundings with words, she also uses them to draw a picture of her neighbourhood and the world of her feelings and affections.

'Mamma always told me that my hair would grow if I combed it carefully every morning, and if I washed it with rainwater. And as the river came down from the mountain range, I thought that water was even better, because snow water comes from a sky that is even higher than the sky where rain comes from.'

Quoting Lidia Blanco again, she says that the 'Through a careful selection of poetic words, [the author] binds together with subtle threads the everyday speech of children and her deep poetic voice, a voice that flies off to create fantastic settings in regions that are seldom visited by people from the big cities.' 'We had a big backyard that extended to the riverbank. In our backyard, there was a willow tree that was like a green sky to eat in its shadow. A little further we had sand, to bury and unbury ourselves, and beyond, the stones—those fantastic stones to join rolling into the water.'

On the other hand, Pilar Muñoz Lascano, commenting on this book and *Azul la cordillera*, says that 'both



books convey a poetic state right from their titles, a way of "being in poetry", as defined by Laura Devetach.'

In a lecture given by Devetach together with Lidia Blanco in 2004, the author refers to this state of 'being in poetry'. She elaborates:

"I am referring to the poetic space as that place or time when a capacity to see the obvious and put it in harmonious or effective words awakens in you. And even without words, that poetic space gives us the ability to weave ties and to recover a poetic dialogue, other than the rigid official dialogue that sometimes our daily life imposes on us.'

Later, she cites Johannes Baujer who expressed it this way: '(It's all about) learning not to remain untouched by what appears to be obvious. We need to become simple and naïve. Explicitly and consciously ask about what we thought we knew, and exchange the big bills of commonplace understanding for these humble coins. It is only then that we can get to the essence of things.'

That is how Lucía understands her outer and inner worlds, and that of her siblings, her mother and her grandmother, all of whom are in a permanent state of poetry and peek into life from their own poetic way of looking and feeling.

'We started to feel that the days were getting shorter and shorter, and the nights were really

long, because we did not feel like talking in the dark too much. The silence was so big that sometimes it buzzed in our ears, and we would hear a noise inside ourselves, like a river, as if as we ran out of words, our blood would get all chatty.'

Lidia Blanco also refers to the way in which María Cristina Ramos proposes an exit door into a different world:

'The stories take place within an ethical framework that is supported by affection and solidarity, as the exit door to a different world where authentic communication and the pursuit of happiness are possible, without contraptions or sophistication (...) In these texts, unhappiness is the product of intolerance and it is resolved in endings that entail an effort on the part of the characters to change the surrounding environment or change themselves, in order to come up with a resolution to the conflict. The right to a better world appears as something natural.'

This definition provided by Lidia Blanco becomes apparent throughout the novel. One of the key characters in that sense is the grandmother.

Lucía tells us that:

"Grandma would come to visit us every day, and she always asked if we had eaten. We always said "yes". Grandma was like 50 years

old but every other day she would get her canoe to go fishing, and when she came back, she always left something for us. She had many grandchildren, but they were all make believe grandchildren, because all of her children had moved away and did not come to visit.'

In the novel, the way out for each of the problems they have to face, as well as to painful situations and even to the small but essential joyful events, is not individual but communal. The hopes and dreams about better times do not translate as inaction; on the contrary, they are a call to action: there are petitions, demonstrations, cooperation between neighbours, a communal orchard, and above all, words with their power to transform.

'Her laughter was made up by the joy we all felt. That joy was going to be the engine to continue fighting against the dryness of the land.'

We find words used to claim, to shelter, to caress, to engage in dialogue. And we also find that the ties, the love and affection and the cooperation are supported and sustained by language.

'In my dream, there was a rabbit. He was as small as a coin, and he was playing in our orchard. He hopped among the leaves and he dug little holes. And then, the carrots appeared and said hello to him. The carrots were together as a bunch, so that he could see that they were people and should not eat them.'

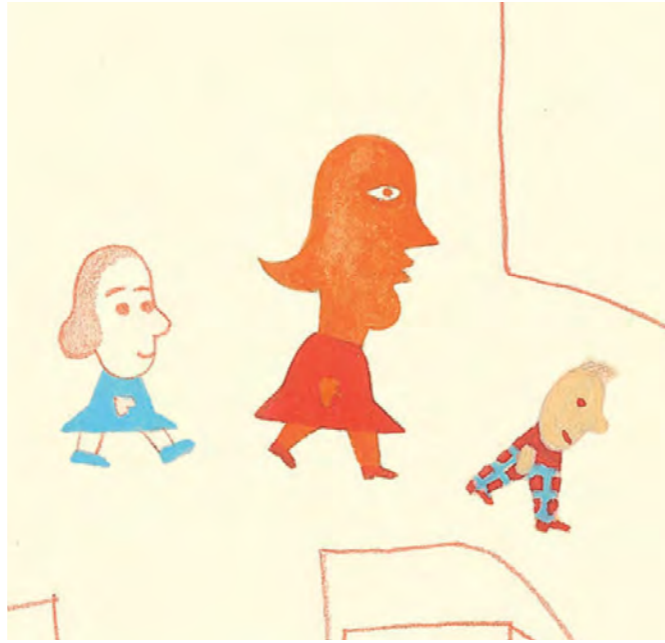
Lucía wonders why there are no footprints in the quiet grey stones in the riverbank. It is words that leave an indelible print, a trail that contains the voices of those who came before, the voices that contribute in building our identity.

María Cristina Ramos draws and paints with the colours of nature and the colours of feelings, with their smells and music notes. She weaves and embroiders the fabric of language, offered as a space for freedom.

In a workshop led by Mirta Colángelo in Bahía Blanca, she told us how she worked on poetry with children:

'We all go outside to watch the trees, to see what they are made of. They are made of leaves, so we picked them up. Then we picked up feathers. The children played with the fallen leaves (...), in sum, they discovered lurking beauty.'

In an interview that Silvia Juri conducted for Edelij,



the author said that 'Poetry rescues the value of silence. You could say that it is that mysterious something that is between words and silence. It is that attempt to slow down time by delaying the next word for a few seconds so as to listen to the next poetic bit, which also harbours silence. I think that this is where the value of a whisper resides.'

As I was reading the novel, I felt that Lucía's whispers came to me, as the rhythm of the narrative gently made its way, without haste, delayed in precious instants between words and silences, surrounded lurking beauty [1].

Blanco, Lidia. 'María Cristina Ramos, una escritura a favor de la infancia'. La Mancha. Papeles de literatura infantil y juvenil N° 13. <http://www.imaginaria.com.ar/03/9/mancha.htm>. November 2000

Blanco, Lidia and Devetach, Laura. 'Fortalecimiento de la tarea educativa en instituciones maternas. Cantos y cuentos en el Jardín Maternal'. Lecture read at Biblioteca del Docente (Argentine teacher's library). CEPA (Teacher Training Public Center). <https://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/areas/educacion/cepa/lblancoconf.pdf>. 22 May 2004.

Juri, Silvina. 'Entrevista a Mirta Colángelo'. EDELIJ. 'Mirta Colángelo susurra tejido'. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aYZoGXAxU00>. October 2011

Muñoz Lascano, Pilar. 'Revalorización del lenguaje poético en la narrativa argentina para niños y jóvenes - Parte III'. Cubos de mi torre, 4 December 2011.

Silveyra, Carlos. 'María Cristina Ramos'. Entry in the Gran Diccionario de Autores Latinoamericanos de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil, SM.

LINKS

All the lyrics of the band Unicanuez are poems by María Cristina Ramos. They include projections of cut-out paper in their presentations:

<https://uncanuez.bandcamp.com/>
<https://vimeo.com/user19251890>

**María Cristina Ramos reading her texts:
Barcos en la lluvia (Boats in the Rain)**

"Dentro de una palabra" (Inside a Word)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2pbteYsabQ>

"Canción para no olvidar" (A Song to Remember)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XE-6SIItq9bY>

"Solar del amor escondido" (A Yard of Hidden Love)

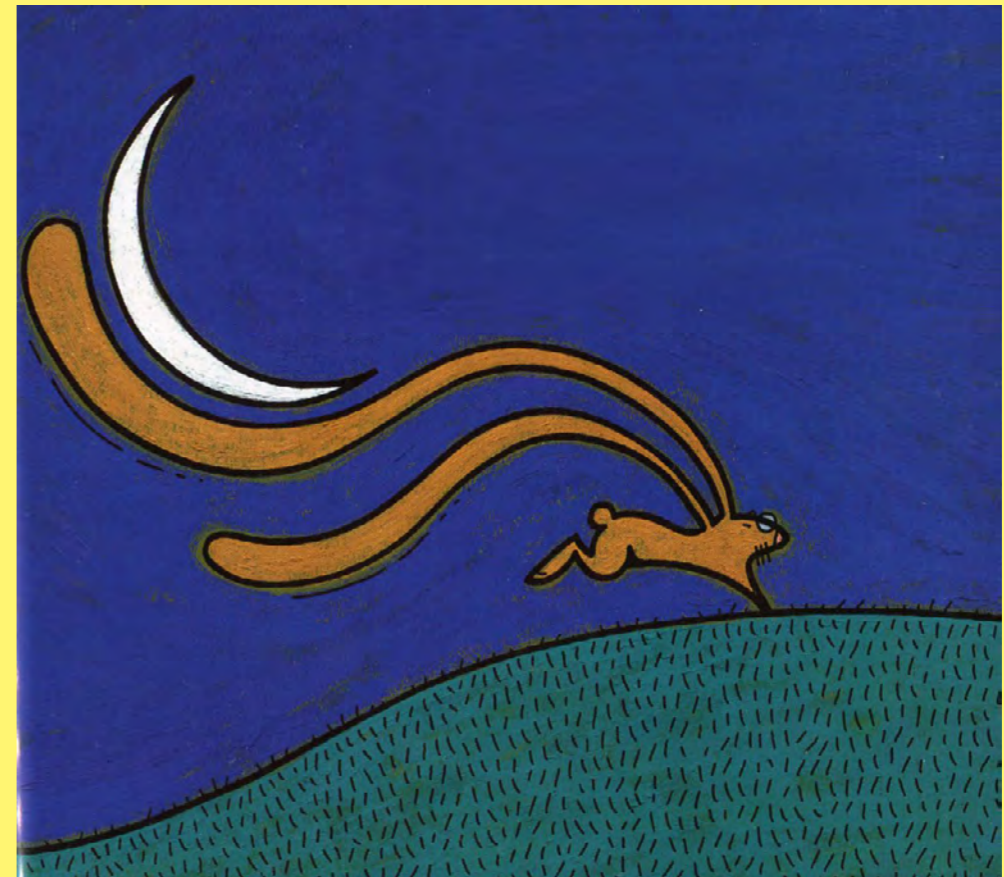
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzQcLWJJ0wA>

"Torcaza" (Ring Dove)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JVh951Giz4>

An interview with the author after receiving the 12th Ibero-American SM Award for Literature for Children and Young Adults:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tnfeUzqcTI>



*'The thread came in and out
The thread would come and go;
The needle, a white bird;
Its tail of silence, bowed.*

*Her Granny doesn't know
Her sewing thread's the size
The girl just needs to find
Her little dreaming eyes.*

*Before the thread runs out
The air has stopped to meet
The butterflies that perch
When the girl is asleep.*

*Just like a sloping petal
Just like a bending flower
Just like a kiss that nests
Into the loving light's hour.*

*It may have been of white thread
The little dream she dreamt
With eyes coming and going
With secrets the two shared.*

María Cristina Ramos
'De hilo blanco' (fragment), in *La escalera*.
Translated by Daniela Bentaneur



